

Introducing First Person: Personal Narratives of Addiction

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For the past two decades, we have been proud to use The BASIS to introduce readers to the latest advances in the scientific study of addiction. Each week, we describe a recent study that adds to our understanding of how people relate to gambling, alcohol, tobacco, or other substances and activities.

The studies we summarize take a [nomothetic approach](#). Researchers using a nomothetic approach assemble samples of people who share similar characteristics. They collect data from these samples and try to generalize their findings to the populations from which the samples were drawn. Because of nomothetic research, we know, for example, that people who are trying to quit smoking [benefit from vigorous exercise](#). We know that [more pregnant women are experiencing opioid use disorders](#) and need access to effective treatments. We know that college students who use stimulants are [especially at risk for gambling problems](#). These and countless other findings derived from nomothetic research have helped us better understand and predict human behavior as it relates to addiction. In doing so, these findings have improved the lives of people touched by addiction.

The [idiographic perspective](#) represents another approach to gathering knowledge. Typically, scholars in the humanities, rather than in the social sciences, take an idiographic approach. This approach involves learning from unique individuals *as unique individuals*—not as representatives of a particular group. Several times, we have used The BASIS to supplement our science reviews with first person stories of addiction. For example, in the most widely read post of 2015, [Ms. Jodie Nealley described](#) how she transitioned from unhealthy alcohol use to compulsive gambling and has been doing the hard work of recovery ever since. More recently, Mr. Ed Talbot, Executive Director of the New Hampshire Council on Compulsive Gambling, shared his story of [38 years in recovery](#) from a gambling disorder. These personal stories serve many purposes. They can help us understand general tendencies that have been revealed through nomothetic research by providing rich examples. They teach us about the personal cost of addiction and sometimes even move us to work towards solutions. Personal

stories also reveal the limitations of nomothetic research: they remind us that general laws are often insufficient to explain or predict individual lives in all their complexity and uniqueness.[\[1\]](#)

Today, we are proud to formally launch a new, semi-regular series called *First Person: Personal Narratives of Addiction*. We will invite individuals to share their stories as a supplement to our weekly science reviews. [We begin with an Op-ed](#) as part of this month's [Special Series on Opioid Dependence and Recovery](#). "JG," a student at a recovery high school in Boston, Mass., shares his story and illustrates how a supportive school environment can be an essential component of recovery from a substance use disorder. Narratives from two of his fellow students will follow later this summer.

We hope you will enjoy and learn from this new enduring series. As always, thank you for reading The BASIS.

—Heather Gray

[\[1\]](#) As described by Runyan, W. M. (1983). Idiographic goals and methods in the study of lives. *Journal of Personality*, 51 (3), 413-437. [Available here](#).